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Inclusion Through Diversity

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tompkins County Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventories Completed

The Tompkins County Planning Department has completed its 2014 inventories of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Energy Use by the Tompkins County community and Tompkins County government operations.

Results will be presented at the Tompkins County Legislature meeting Tuesday, September 20th.

The Community Inventory accounts for all GHG emissions from Tompkins County, including governments, higher education institutions, residents, non-profit organizations, and businesses. The County Government Operations Inventory accounts for all GHG emissions associated with Tompkins County government operations, including the County's buildings and facilities as well as its vehicle fleet and off-road equipment.

Applying methodology consistent with the County's previous 2008 inventory shows that the Tompkins County Community reduced its emissions by 21% between 2008 and 2014 and Tompkins County Government reduced its emissions by 53% during this same time period. This would put both the Community and County Government ahead of the target goal of a 20% reduction by 2020, and positions both to achieve the goal adopted by the County Legislature of at least an 80% reduction in emissions from 2008 levels by 2050. The 2014 inventory also showed that renewable energy generation in the County increased by 136% since 2008.

"While inventory findings illustrate the significant progress in reducing both emissions and energy use, this positive news is part of the evolving story surrounding climate change and the role that various greenhouse gases play in creating that change" according to Deputy Commissioner of Planning Katherine Borgella.

Between 2008 and 2014 the source of natural gas used in the community is believed to have transitioned from wells drilled through conventional methods to fracked gas, primarily coming from the Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania. The international scientific community also has placed increased emphasis in recent years on the global warming impact of methane (86 times that of carbon dioxide over a twenty-year time horizon) and the importance of reducing methane emissions to combat the impacts of climate change over the next few decades. Methane is the primary component of natural gas.

“Emissions associated with the use of fracked shale gas are calculated very differently depending on whether one uses currently accepted GHG accounting, or if the findings of evolving climate science on methane are applied.” Borgella noted. “Although the inventories are calculated using widely-accepted international protocols, it is important to recognize the significance of methane emissions and look ahead to what may soon be modifications to those protocols to better understand the extreme impacts shale gas may have in the near term.”

Borgella continued, “With guidance from internationally-renowned experts from our community to account for the methane leaks from shale gas that occur outside the county, and accounting for the increased significance of methane’s impact in the near term, estimates are that, rather than decreasing, emissions that could be attributed to energy use in the community may have actually increased by 67% and risen by 10% for County Government between 2008 and 2014.”

The inventories point to the importance of continuing the growth of renewable energy generation to replace fossil fuel use and addressing transportation-related emissions. Results from the inventories will be used to inform the update to the County’s 2020 Energy Strategy, as well as future efforts to reduce emissions and energy consumption in Tompkins County.

The inventories and their supporting documents are available for review at the Planning Department website at <http://tompkinscountyny.gov/planning/energy-climate>.

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